

Cardinal Compositions

University of Louisville

Improving the Bicycle System on the University of Louisville's Campus

Allan Bagley

Cardinal Compositions, vol. 4 (2020), pp. 35-37.

For the Classroom

After reading the essay, ask students to consider how the author constructs their argument:

1. Have students highlight in one color the claims the writer makes.
2. Then, have them highlight in a different color the evidence the writer provides to support those claims.
3. Students should then form small groups, share their selections with each other, reach consensus on the best evidence, and report reasons for their choices to the whole class.

Improving the Bicycle System on the University of Louisville's Campus

Allan Bagley

Bicycling would seem to be a logical way to get around the University of Louisville (UofL), and it is. Bicycling can significantly reduce commute times, and you can park your bicycle all over campus. However, if you wish to leave or get to campus on a bicycle, then the roads feel unsafe. Part of this unease is founded by the fact that there is no consistent pattern to where bicyclists are supposed to ride on the road. Some roads have bicyclists riding in their own separate lane. Other times there is no separate lane for bicyclists, but neither the cars nor the bicyclists know this until they are on the portion of the road lacking the bicycle lane. This is especially an issue around UofL because around UofL is a convergence point for students, and while there are more commuters to UofL that pass through, all the bicycle lanes disappear. Major road changes could significantly improve bicyclists safety when commuting to UofL.

Bicycles are considered vehicles and as such are expected to obey the same laws as cars (Kentucky Laws and Regulations, 2016). There is a major difference though, and that difference is the size. If a car hits another car both parties stand a chance, but if a car hits a bicycle then the bicycle will lose every time. Bicycles including the rider weigh a total of 150 to 250 pounds while cars usually weigh more than a ton. Add to this the fact that bicycles only balance on two wheels, one in front of the other, and a collision is not going to end well for the bicyclist even at low speeds.

As it is the roads do not feel safe for bicycling. Bicyclists can end up feeling very vulnerable when they are in the middle of the road with cars and buses next to and behind them. Bicyclists almost have options: they could “walk dead center: follow that white line; avoid ambush cover” (Mano, 166), but that white line is the ambush cover, cars and trucks waiting right next door. They could bicycle on the sidewalk and ignore the fact pedestrians exist, but it is against the law to bicycle on sidewalks. At the end of the day bicyclists just have to get back on the road and bicycle with all the cars.

As a bicyclist around UofL there are times when I feel uncomfortable. The roads surrounding UofL are at times relatively busy with lines of cars regularly occurring at each stop light. During these times, I find, almost inevitably, that I am surrounded on all sides by cars. On the off chance that I am not surrounded by cars it is simply because they have all passed me, and the next wave has yet to catch up. That is another thing. When cars are behind you, the cars will usually try to pass you if they can. If they cannot pass you, though, they just end up staying directly behind you where they are hard to see. When a car is behind me, it is hard to keep tabs on the cars that are not behind me at the same time. This leads to the challenge of both looking forward and then back over your shoulder to keep tabs on everything going on around you while still doing your part of bicycling safely.

There are different ways roads can be set up for bicycles. There can be bicycle lanes, or no bicycle lanes, or somewhere between the two. This grey zone can include scenarios like there being wider streets to make it safer for bicyclists when a car is passing, or there being bicycle lanes only part of the time. When there are bicycle lanes everywhere, it is relatively easy to keep track of all the cars, but when entering the grey zone of inconsistent bicycle lane placement, it becomes a lot harder to be sure where the cars surrounding you will be. When there are bicycle lanes everywhere, you have a space designed for the bicyclists use. In the grey zone you do not really know what to expect. If there is a bicycle lane and then that lane suddenly ends, as a bicyclist you then have to figure out how to safely merge into the lane next to you before you run yourself off the road or run into something.

Fourth Street is an example of what can be done to increase bicyclists' safety near campus. On either side of the road there is not only a bicycle lane, but the bicycle lanes also have buffers on either side between the lane and the cars. Were it not for the fact that the Fourth Street bicycle lane disappears after only two blocks, Fourth Street could be the model for Louisville's bicycle lanes. If all the roads around campus had bicycle lanes like on Fourth Street, there would be little need for bicyclists to be in the same lanes as cars except for when they need to make a turn.

Unfortunately, not all of the roads around campus have extra space to add a bicycle lane. According to Branion-Calles (2019), "Access to bicycle infrastructure is associated with higher perceived bicycling safety," so the "easy" solution to this problem would be to just make the space to add bicycle lanes, but to do so would require expanding the roads. To expand the roads would require land. To acquire land would cost money, and to then build on this land would cost even more money. So, the question is: is it worth the cost of expanding the roads just to add a bicycle lane? According to *The Courier Journal* 0.5 percent of the Louisville population bicycle to work (Bruggers, 2015), and there is likely a higher percentage of students at UofL who use a bicycle as their main form of transportation.

As it stands the least bicyclists could ask for would be that it is made clearer to the cars where on the road they can expect bicyclists to appear and ride. Even if the roads are too narrow to add a bicycle lane, signs should be added. Were signs added, cars would know ahead of time where on the road bicycles will be. Were a mark signaling the end of a bicycle lane added, bicyclists could know they have to merge into the rest of the traffic before they are facing cars unannounced.

Bicycling is an obvious way to get around while on the UofL campus, but when you cannot get to campus by bicycle without using roads that are readily perceived as unsafe, it makes it harder to choose the bicycle as your preferred form of transportation. With bicycle lanes popping in and out of existence, it is hard to know where on the road you should be next block. Where there is space, bicycle lanes should be added. Where the roads are too narrow, there should be signs. If bicycle lanes and signs are added to improve commuting by bicycle, it could make getting to campus easier and safer for many students.

References

- Branion-Calles, Michael, et al. "Associations between individual characteristics, availability of bicycle infrastructure, and city-wide safety perceptions of bicycling: A cross-sectional survey of bicyclists in 6 Canadian and U.S. cities." *EBSCO*, Regine Gerike, Audrey de Nazelle, Rico Wittwer, *John Parkin* May, 2019, science/article/pii/S0965856417314933.
- Bruggers, James. "Road warriors: Ranking Louisville's commute." *The Courier Journal*, May 21, 2015, www.courier-journal.com/story/watchdog-earth/2015/05/20/commuting--work--30-largest-cities/27635473/.
- "Kentucky Laws And Regulations For Bicycle Travel." *transportation.ky.gov*, 2016, transportation.ky.gov/BikeWalk/Documents/KY%20Laws%20and%20Rules%20for%20Bicycle%20Travel_updated_2016.pdf
- Mano, D. Keith. "How To Keep From Being Mugged" 1982. *The Little Norton Reader 50 Essays From The First 50 Years*, edited by Melissa A. Goldwaite, W.W. Norton And CO, 2017, pp. 166-167.